

WILLARD (S.D.)

*Biographical memoir of
Casper Van Wie Burton x x x x*



N.Y. L

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR

OF

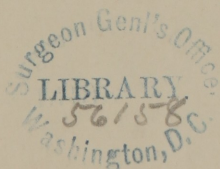
✓
CASPER VAN WIE BURTON, M. D.,

OF

*Presented by
N.Y. S. Liby*
LANSINGBURGH.

BY SYLVESTER D. WILLARD, M. D.,

ALBANY.



TROY, N. Y.:

TROY DAILY TIMES PRINT.

1861.

MEMOIR.*

THERE are shades of sadness in our annual greetings: our cordial salutations are hushed while silently we press the hand of friendship, as we hear of a name familiar and endeared pronounced, with the melancholy response—HE IS DEAD. Instinctively we are chilled with emotion and compress our lips to bear it manfully and to hide the struggle that goes on in our hearts when cherished friendships are broken, and the heavy tidings fall upon our ears that a brother has preceded us from the shores of time. To-day we miss the presence of CASPER VAN WIE BURTON. His pleasant smile and kind expressions we may retain, but he has gone from us to return never again.

It is a grateful task which our Institution imposes, to speak of those with whom we have been

* This Memoir was prepared for the Medical Society of the State of New York, and presented at its annual meeting in Albany, on the 5th February, 1861.

pleasantly associated, and to record the testimony of their worth and virtues.

The subject of this sketch was the third son of Matthew Burton, a native of Columbia county. His mother was of Dutch extraction, as is indicated in the name of her son.

CASPER was born at Albany, in that part of the city formerly known as the Colonie, which was generally occupied by the Dutch, on the 15th of July, 1810. His education seems to have been received under the instruction of an English tutor, who bestowed upon him advantages that were superior to those afforded by the schools of that day. His future was to take its complexion from his own labors, and accordingly at the age of seventeen years he went to learn the business of book-binding, and subsequently removed to Troy for the purpose of prosecuting it more successfully. Here he became quite extensively engaged in publishing also, under the firm of Tuttle, Belcher & Burton, and a part of this time he was connected with the editorial department of the Troy Morning Mail. This labor necessarily involved constant effort, but his energy and industry were commen-

surate with the requirements that were made upon them. It is evident, however, that the work was not adapted to his taste, and that he had not yet reached the channel through which his usefulness and influence were to flow.

Circumstances induced him to begin the study of medicine, and he was most fortunate in becoming a pupil of a gentleman of pure and noble mind, of gentle and winning manners, of systematic habits, of untiring industry, of catholic sentiments, and of a devoted attachment to his profession, whose name it is almost superfluous to mention, and who would have now been the biographer of his pupil, except that on him there is resting the mantle of a deep domestic bereavement.

It was a most fortunate event then, that his medical pupilage was passed under the direction of one so accomplished as Dr. Thomas C. Brinsmade, with whose example he became imbued, and which he ever sought to emulate.

He attended lectures at the Albany Medical College, and received his degree in medicine at that Institution in 1842, when he had nearly completed his thirty-second year.

The Inaugural thesis which he presented was on "Dissecting Wounds, their Nature and Treatment." This subject had received his mature consideration, he having been a victim of the disease. His fellow student, a brother of the late Dr. Hammond of West Troy, became poisoned while making a post-mortem examination upon a patient who had died of puerperal fever. The malady proved fatal in a few days after, when Mr. Burton aided in an examination upon the body of his friend, having the same afternoon slightly punctured his thumb while pruning a rose bush, and through this puncture he supposed some particle of virus was conveyed into his circulation. His sufferings from this trifling accident were protracted through three months, and nearly cost his life. The thesis is one of great practical value.

His mental training had been such, and such his self-reliance that he was at once prepared to enter upon the active duties of professional life. He remained in Troy about one year, when he removed to Lansingburgh, a beautiful village on the right bank of the Hudson, near the conflux of the

Mohawk; a place where nature has lent her charms to make attractive the abode of man.

Dr. Burton was at this time in the vigor of early manhood, allured by an enthusiastic love for his profession, and stimulated by a laudable ambition, and with a field before him that he was peculiarly fitted to occupy. Life was before him not ideal, but earnest, and he seemed impressed with its vast importance. He became associated with Dr. Leonard, a business relation that continued pleasantly for eight years, and which terminated only when Dr. Leonard was ready to retire from the more active labors of the profession. It served to introduce Dr. Burton, without delay, into a full practice, while it afforded the advantages of experience and counsel. His professional labors were pursued here for seventeen years with scarcely an interruption, and with unvarying success and satisfaction. He was meanwhile constantly prosecuting his studies in the natural sciences and literature, to both of which he manifested an ardent attachment. He zealously pushed his investigations into the field of comparative anatomy and physiology by repeated and careful dissections,

while to taxidermy he likewise gave considerable attention, and in the art attained respectable skill. His collection embraced at least two hundred specimens of birds and animals belonging to this section of country, and which scientifically arranged now form a part of Dr. Leonard's very valuable cabinet. He was also somewhat versed in mineralogy and conchology. Meanwhile and until nearly three years ago, when the paramount claims of his profession compelled him to resign the position, he was a member of the Faculty of the Lansingburgh Female Seminary, and each week during the term gave three lectures on physiology and hygiene; on these and miscellaneous subjects he has left in manuscript about one hundred and fifty lectures. He was a pleasing speaker and not infrequently appeared before the literary societies in his own vicinity. Occasionally he found leisure to contribute a brief article to the medical journals. One of these is a monograph of "False Aneurism," published in the Cincinnati Medical Observer for April, 1856, and another is the use of "Iodide of Potassium in Hydrocephalus" illustrated by five cases, in the American Medical

Monthly for April, 1857. Both of these articles are characterized by clearness and perspicuity of thought and language.

In 1856, Dr. Burton delivered an address before the Alumni of the Albany Medical College, choosing for his subject "The Character of the Faithful Medical Man." Having dwelt upon the intellectual and moral qualities such a man must possess as essential to success, and impressed the importance of ceaseless fidelity to his patient, he says, and most truthfully: "There is no incompatibility between professional fidelity and Christian candor; with one the physican should begin to practice, with the other he should certainly close. The soothing influence of religious sentiment is no mean assistant to the prescription, nor to the operation of medicine, nor if example is required to enforce so evident a course, are there wanting many noble instances in the highest walks of the profession." The degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon Dr. Burton, by the Rochester University, in 1853. He occupied the presidency of the Rensselaer County Medical Society, in 1857, and was the same year elected a permanent

member of the Medical Society of the State of New York. In 1853 he had been made a corresponding vaccinator of the London Vaccine establishment, and in 1857 an honorary member of the New York Chirurgical Society. These several distinctions sufficiently indicate that his reputation and character had secured esteem wherever he was known.

Dr. Burton possessed an enviable local reputation as an obstetrician, more than three thousand cases having come under his care in private practice in the eighteen years that he was engaged in it. His statistical tables of this practice he had intended to compile for publication, and they would have been valuable for their perfect reliability.

He occupied the position of Counseling physician to the Troy Hospital, for six years preceding his death.

During the summer of 1860, Dr. Burton was laboriously engaged in professional duties. Diphtheria prevailed extensively in Lansingburgh for the first time, and the doctor had a large number of cases under his care. These he watched with his usual fidelity and devotion. His system at length became impregnated with the poison of

diphtheria, which he in vain attempted to resist. He was constantly watched through his illness by his son, Dr. Matthew H. Burton of Troy, who gave his entire attention to the care of his father. Dr. Leonard, with Dr. Brinsmade of Troy, were his medical counsel, and contributed all that skill and kindness could bestow; but his symptoms became typhoid, and he died on the 23d of September, having completed the fiftieth year of his age.

When the news of his death went forth, one veil of mourning seemed to rest upon the village of Lansingburgh, and its common heart pulsated in deep grief. He was a man without enemies, and greatly beloved. His friends — the whole community, were sincerely attached to him, and were startled at their own loss in his death. Hundreds came to his funeral who could not there conceal the bereavement they had sustained. It is seldom that such impressive sympathy is manifested as on this occasion.

The character of Dr. Burton is briefly and significantly expressed in the resolution presented at the meeting of the Rensselaer County Medical

Society, in view of his death: "Energy, activity, industry, honorable feeling and bearing in his intercourse with physicians, untiring devotion to the interests of the sick intrusted to his care, constituted the leading characteristics of his professional life; courtesy, cheerfulness, kindness and affection, which he manifested in private, social and domestic life, won for him numerous and warm friends, who now sincerely deplore his death." These are no words of eulogy for the dead, but a faithful picture of the man while living. His cheerfulness always inspired in the sick room, and he ever manifested a tender solicitude and sympathy for his patients.

Says his pastor, the Rev. Mr. Cushing, of the Methodist church, "with a heart which overflowed with sympathy, he seemed to estimate and understand the feelings of the friends and the sufferings of the patient." His heart was in his work. Mr. Cushing says of him: "As a Christian he was always consistent; his private life, together with his own confessions, assure us that he lived in favor with God." The Rev. Mr. Twing, of the Episcopal church, who took part in the funeral services,

and with whom he had been a co-laborer through the whole period of his professional life, bore testimony in profound and unaffected sympathy, to his uprightness and Christian virtues.

Dr. Burton left four sons and three daughters. The eldest son is Dr. Matthew H. Burton, one of the surgeons of the Troy Hospital; and upon whom may there gracefully rest the mantle of his father's virtues.

The public could ill afford to lose such a man as Dr. Burton, nor could the profession afford to lose from their ranks one so enlightened, so unostentatious, so skillful as he. It might seem invidious to add the testimony of my own warm personal friendship; sufficient to say that in my last interview with him, only a few days before his illness, the subject of our conversation was a plan for giving additional interest to this Society, and of the disease by which, as it proved, he was to die.

